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OSD FOR ISA/AP LAWLESS/BASALLA; COMUSJAPAN FOR J01/J4/J5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/27/2016
TAGS: MARR PGOV JA
SUBJECT: DEFMIN KYUMA EXPLORES REVISIONS TO FRF PLAN

Classified By: CDA Joseph R. Donovan, Reason: 1.5 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Japan Defense Agency (JDA) officials are publicly denying media reports that JDA is considering altering construction plans for the Futenma MCAS Replacement Facility (FRF). Privately, Japanese officials acknowledge that Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma has engaged with Okinawan Governor Hirokazu Nakaima on options for altering the FRF plan. JDA officials say they are deeply frustrated by Kyuma's machinations and do not share his view that substantive changes to the FRF plan are necessary to secure Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) support. Senior MOFA and Cabinet Office officials met on December 28 to confirm their opposition to any change to the May 1 FRF plan. End Summary.

Lots of Smoke
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¶2. (C) A flurry of press reports on December 28 has led to speculation over JDA's intention to adjust the construction plan for the FRF at Camp Schwab. Okinawa media outlets reported on December 28 that during a recent meeting with leaders from Nago City, JDA officials had offered to move the "V-shape" runway 100 meters off-shore. Reports in the mainland press alleged that Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma has instructed his staff to explore options for adjusting the runway plan. One Okinawan report quoted a "JDA leader" as going even further by asserting that "it is not necessary" to stick to the FRF plan agreed upon bilaterally on May 1.

¶3. (C) JDA Budget Division Director Daisuke Monma contacted the embassy on December 28 to refute reports of back-room discussions on FRF revisions and assure the USG that JDA remains committed to implementing the May 1 agreement. Monma acknowledged that he and JDA Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya did meet with four Nago area village mayors on December 24, but only to explain why their request to move the runway away from the coastal area at Camp Schwab was unfeasible. According to Monma, Higashi Village Mayor Shigeru Miyagi, who has advocated a shift away from the coast, intentionally misrepresented the JDA brief to the press (Note: contacts have offered conflicting reports on Moriya's position on the FRF, but all confirm that Monma has consistently opposed FRF revisions in internal meetings and in contacts with Okinawan leaders. End Note).

And Mirrors
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¶4. (C) MOFA Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) Division Director Osamu Iizawa said that he had learned from JDA reporters that Kyuma did not know about the December 24

meeting and expressed annoyance when asked by reporters on December 27 about Moriya's rejection of revisions to the FRF plan. Kyuma, the "JDA leader" referenced in reports, allegedly stated that it is not necessary to stick to the FRQ plan as agreed upon in the May 1 realignment Roadmap, but that any changes would require concurrence from all parties involved, including the United States. On this last point, Kyuma reportedly told the assembled journalists that the inflexible U.S. stance would make it harder to revise the May 1 agreement.

¶5. (C) Iizawa said that Kyuma is locked in an increasingly acrimonious debate with his own ministry, including with deputy Moriya, over the necessity of offering concessions to Nakaima on FRF. Mitsuko Hayashi, JDA's Okinawa Realignment Action Officer, said there is deep frustration within JDA over Kyuma's insistence on revising the FRF plan. Hayashi acknowledged that some minor changes could potentially be made under the banner of "technical adjustments," but asserted that even these would risk delaying the implementation timeline. There are other incentives, including accelerated work on FRF construction and base consolidation, that would give Nakaima the "face" he requires without disrupting realignment efforts, she insisted.

¶6. (C) This view was echoed by Osamu Ashitomi, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet member representing the district hosting Futenma MCAS. Ashitomi said that JDA's formal proposal to accelerate construction at the FRF would suffice to bring Nakaima around. "All he needs is 'fuzziness,'" Ashitomi insisted. "If visible construction work at Camp Schwab can begin in three years time," he continued, "Nakaima can tell the voters that he made real progress on removing the danger at Futenma." Ashitomi, and embassy contacts at the OPG Tokyo office, have expressed puzzlement over Kyuma's eagerness to compromise with the new governor.

Ball Heading to Abe's Court?
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¶7. (C) Iizawa said that MOFA North American Affairs Director General Chikao Kawai held an emergency meeting with Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Atsuo Saka on December 28 to confirm the government's intention to reject any attempt by Kyuma to reopen the May 1 agreement. Cabinet Counselor Akihiko Nakajima said that the Cabinet Office fully shares MOFA and JDA concerns over Kyuma's behavior, but speculated that it may take a personal intervention by the Prime Minister to put Kyuma back in his place. MOFA Security Treaty Division Junji Shimada offered a similar assessment, noting that Kyuma appears to believe he has been personally authorized by PM Abe to implement the base realignment agreement as he sees fit.
DONOVAN